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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA DRUG SURVEY RESULTS OUT AND GOC USES THEM TO PUSH  
FOR CRIMINALIZATION OF CONSUMPTION

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Government of Colombia released the National Household Drug Consumption Survey's executive summary on February 24 and used the results to re-launch efforts to penalize possession of a personal dosage of drugs, fueling the political battle between President Alvaro Uribe and Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran over this issue. Of the nearly 30,000 Colombians who completed the Survey, 9.1 percent admitted to use of illegal drugs at least once in their lifetimes - with marijuana being the most popular drug. The results showed that Colombian drug use is on average with other South American countries. Under the rubric of intending to adopt an integral antinarcotics strategy that addresses both demand and supply of drugs, President Uribe is using the survey's results as a tool to push for criminalization of consumption in spite of objections by the Prosecutor General. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) OAS's Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD in its Spanish Acronym) applied the SIDUC methodology to complete the largest national household drug use survey in Latin America and the first nationwide survey of drug consumption in Colombia since 1996. With the assistance from the technical committee composed of members from the National Directorate of Dangerous Drugs (DNE in its Spanish acronym), Ministry of Social Protection, the UNODC, and NAS Bogota, the National Consulting Center (CNC is its Spanish acronym) interviewed more than 46,000 people from 126 municipalities, ages 12 to 65 (representing 20 million people out of a total Colombian population of 44 million). 29,164 people completed the 62-question Survey. The results showed that 9.1 percent of Colombians between ages 12 to 65, or 1,800,000 people, have consumed illegal drugs at least once in their lifetimes.

¶3. (U) Marijuana remained the most popular drug of choice with eight percent of the Colombian population, or close to 1,600,000 people, admitting to having consumed it at least once in their lifetimes; about 1.3 percent of the Colombian population represented (250,000 people) could be considered as abusers of marijuana. Almost half-a-million people (2.5 percent of the population represented) have tried cocaine at least once in their lives, with about 140,000 people having consumed it within the last 12 months; about 0.4 percent of population, or 85,000 persons, are abusers of the drug. Cocaine users tend to be between 18 and 34 years-old and be males. Less than one percent of the population surveyed reported using either heroin or ecstasy.

¶4. (U) Colombian illegal drug use rate is average for South America - similar to that in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru, and considerably less than that in Brazil and Argentina. Due to an absence of a nationwide drug consumption survey in Colombia since 1996, and the use of different methodology at that time, the current survey's results cannot show whether consumption in the country is technically increasing or decreasing, although all reports from the NGO and medical community indicate that consumption is increasing.

¶15. (U) The main consumers of illegal drugs, representing six percent of those interviewed were 18-24 year-olds; followed by 15-34, and then by 12-17 year-olds. The greatest consumers who used drugs recently came from the upper echelons of the society with 4.2 percent consumption in stratum 4 (stratum 6 is the wealthiest, whereas stratum 1 is the poorest); followed by strata 5 and 6 representatives with combined consumption of 2.9 percent; those in strata 3 represented 2.8 percent of consumption; and 2.4 percent of consumption occurred in each strata 1 and 2. The greatest use of illegal drugs occurs in the department of Antioquia, the capital of which is Medellin.

¶16. (U) The Survey results show that 48 percent of total persons interviewed and 44 percent of school-aged children (12-17 years-old) found it easy to obtain marijuana. Cocaine is also easily accessible - 28 percent of the population surveyed found it to be easy to get cocaine, with 18-34 year olds and members of strata 4 and 3 finding it the easiest.

¶17. (SBU) Immediately after receiving the executive summary of the results, President Uribe seized the opportunity to re-launch efforts (for the fourth time) to criminalize the possession of personal dose of drugs, fueling the fight with Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran who opposes such criminalization. At President Uribe's urging, on February 24, Minister of Interior and Justice Fabio Valencia, Vice-Minister for Justice Miguel Ceballos, Vice Minister for Social Protection Carlos Ignacio Cuervo, Director of the DNE Carlos Albornoz, and UNODC representative Aldo Lale-Demoz announced the survey's executive summary results. Minister of Interior clearly supported the President's effort to criminalize possession of personal dose of drugs blaming the demonstrated drug consumption on free distribution of illegal substances.

¶18. (SBU) Addressing the Prosecutor General's protests that addiction to drugs is a sickness and should be treated with policies of

education and health, not penalization, Minister Valencia clarified that criminalizing consumption did not mean imposing penal sanctions, but rather it meant subjecting the users to voluntary or obligatory treatment for addiction. The GOC is proposing establishing drug courts composed of judges and medical personnel to either send users for treatment or incarceration depending on the assessment of health and criminal issues. The drug courts would first be established in areas where the highest rates of consumption were shown - Antioquia, Bogota, Valle, Cauca and Narino; then they would be replicated in the rest of the country. President Uribe is pushing the criminalization of personal dose under the rubric that the GOC wants an integral policy against drugs - controlling not only the supply, but also demand.

¶19. (SBU) The DNE, the Ministry of Social Protection, and INL/NAS Bogota financed the survey with the INL/NAS contributing approximately USD 330,000 for the USD 800,000 Study. All parties participated on the technical committee, while UNODC managed the survey firm and OAS/CICAD analyzed the results. The complete results of the survey will be analyzed and available within the next two months.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT. Judging by the precipitous release of the results, the survey has become a political tool for President Uribe to leverage advantage in the fight with the Prosecutor General over personal dose, and push Uribe's agenda forward in what could be his last year of presidency. The recent criticism by the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy and others claiming that criminalization is a repressive approach to fight consumption, spurred the GOC to attempt to appease the critics by mollifying the consequences of criminalization of a personal dosage. However, measures such as drug courts are unlikely to be instituted any time soon without a change in law and the GOC will face a serious battle on the way. The Supreme Court threw out attempts to criminalize personal consumption more than a decade ago, and the judiciary would need to be convinced to support measures for which a budget does not exist, in a time of shrinking budgets. END COMMENT.

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